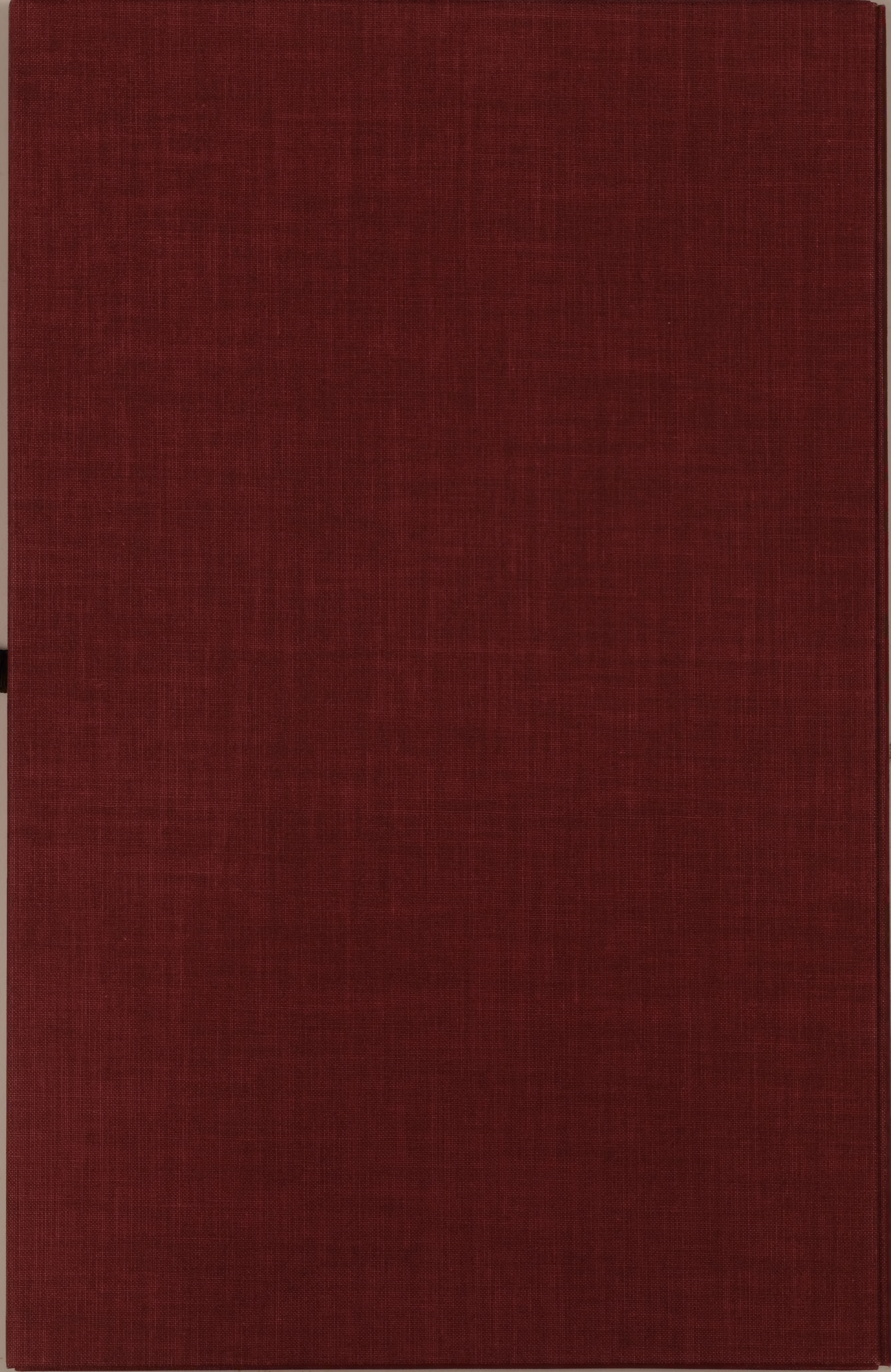






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JOHN AND MARTHA DANIELS

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Somerville, Edith OE (1858-1949).

Manuscript of Edith Somerville's article about writer Robert Smith Surtees, which appeared in the 15 March 1930 issue of the *New Statesman* magazine.

Edith Somerville was a great admirer of Robert Smith Surtees. Her praise for John Leech, one of Surtees's illustrators, is equally high. This essay bridges the period between Surtees's novels with Leech illustrations, and the Somerville and Ross novels with Somerville's illustrations.

CERTÉS A CLASSIC

If the "Concise Oxford Dictionary" is consulted we find

Italiés

"Cer-tēs. (Archaic) Assuredly. I assure you." Retaining the pronunciation, but varying the spelling, the result arrived at brings me to the matter in hand — "Surtees, a classic".

Assuredly (as the dictionary says) this is hardly open to question. If to have been continuously printed & reprinted for close on a hundred years establishes such a claim, Mr Robert Smith Surtees' works are classics, & as such are entitled to a permanent place in all gentlemanly & self-respecting libraries. And lest there should yet be a library that lacks ^{so obviously} these indispensable volumes, a new edition of them is now being offered to the world.

It is, to be sure, always understood that what are known as Library Editions are not intended to be read. This well-recognised understanding no doubt explains not only their splendour, but also their longevity. Their gilded backs may be contemplated at once proudly & without apprehension. A Library Edition is a splendid tomb, & the repose of the dead must not be broken.

I am aware that the spirit of Conservatism is not a foible of "The New Statesman"; yet it is impossible to refrain from eulogy of the magnificent Conservatism of British youth, "Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers who begat us", and (it may be added) therefore felt themselves entitled to decide for their offspring which men were famous & worthy of praise, and the offspring have, for the most part, reverently

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accepted the verdict of the fathers. I cannot think that there lives a subaltern (or indeed any young man of spirit) with soul so dead that, if the name of Surtees is mentioned, he will not, with a smile of retrospective affection, respond "Hellish dark, & smells of cheese!" and, further, "Come hup, I say, you hugly beast!"

On these two quotations - it is not too much to say - hangs immortality.

The long series of ^{Surtees'} Sporting works began in about the year 1832, with ~~the~~ "Jorrocks' Jaunts & Jollities", (a title, one would say, ~~was~~ calculated to ~~discourage~~ ^{admit} the most devoted) & they ended in 1865, with "Mr Facry Romford's Hounds", which was published in the year after the death of Surtees. The birth of Jorrocks appears to have occurred in a story, written for the New Sporting Magazine, called "Swell & the Surrey". In this the famous fox-hunting Cockney grocer is little more than mentioned, the ~~the~~ interest concentrating on the "Regular Swell from Melton-Mowbray, a terrible tiger, with a profusion of well-waxed ringlets, a corresponding infinity of whisker, terminating at the chin, & there joining an enormous pair of moustaches" - who seems to have made as great a sensation in Surrey in 1832, as he might in Leicestershire (or anywhere else) to day.

But as the book lengthens, it may be said that Mr Jorrocks strengthens. His v's and w's become more inevitably exchanged, his h's more conscientiously misplaced. By the time he is giving a dinner party in honour

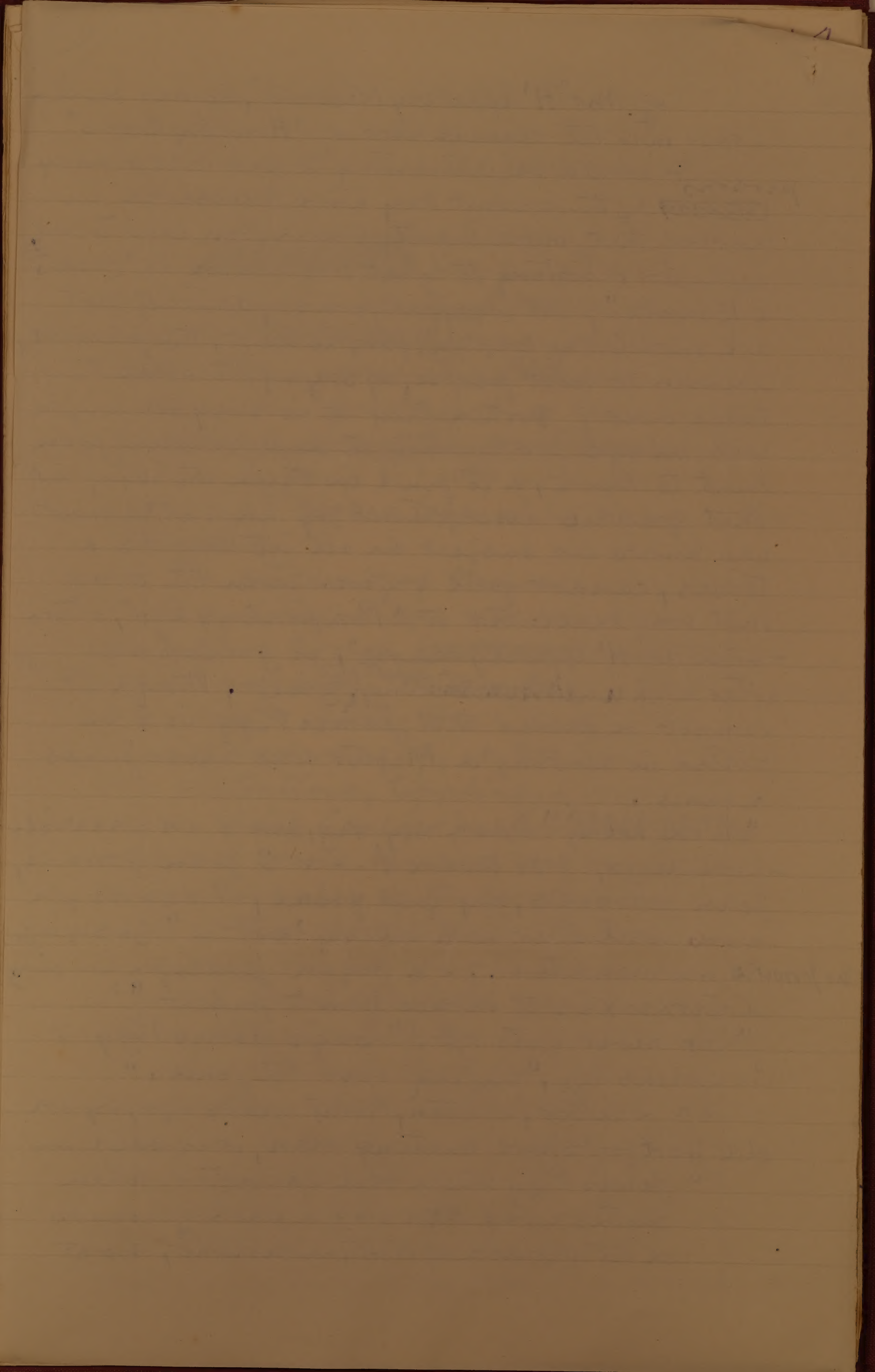
of Mr "H" Apperley Nimrod", he has developed into the classic hero of "Handley Cross". It would be interesting to know how many persons ~~there~~ of the present day have succeeded in reading that monumental work from cover to cover without resorting to what are known as "Leaps & Bounds" (two identical forms of activity that are invariably coupled, for, no doubt, the pleasure, common to most people, of saying the same thing twice over) Fortunately it is easy for anyone with an eye for country to leap (or bound) from hunt to hunt, & to find in them the enjoyment that graphic descriptions by an enthusiast who knows his subject in all its moods & tenses, cannot fail to give. Even the drag that was dedicated to "Pomponius Ego", otherwise Mr "H" Apperley Nimrod", is galloped after with undiminished ^{infectious} zest, though it cannot be denied that James Pigg is to be pitied in serving a Master who never jumps a fence.

"Dash my vig, here's an unavoidable leap, I do believe! . . . O John Jorrocks, John Jorrocks, my good friend, I wishes you were well over with all my 'eart -" So saying, Mr Jorrocks dismounted . . . & began jerking & coaxing Arterxerxes to induce him to follow."

"Ar niver gets off!" says James Pigg to Pomponius Ego, "flying over the fence."

In a letter, written, thirty years ago, by an old Hertfordshire hunting man, it is said —

"James Pigg was a real character. When Surtees lived there was a pack of hounds on the borders of Northumberland, now



incorporated with the Bores of Derwent. One Jonathan Richardson was Master, & Josh Kirke huntsman, & old Josh was the original of James Pigg".

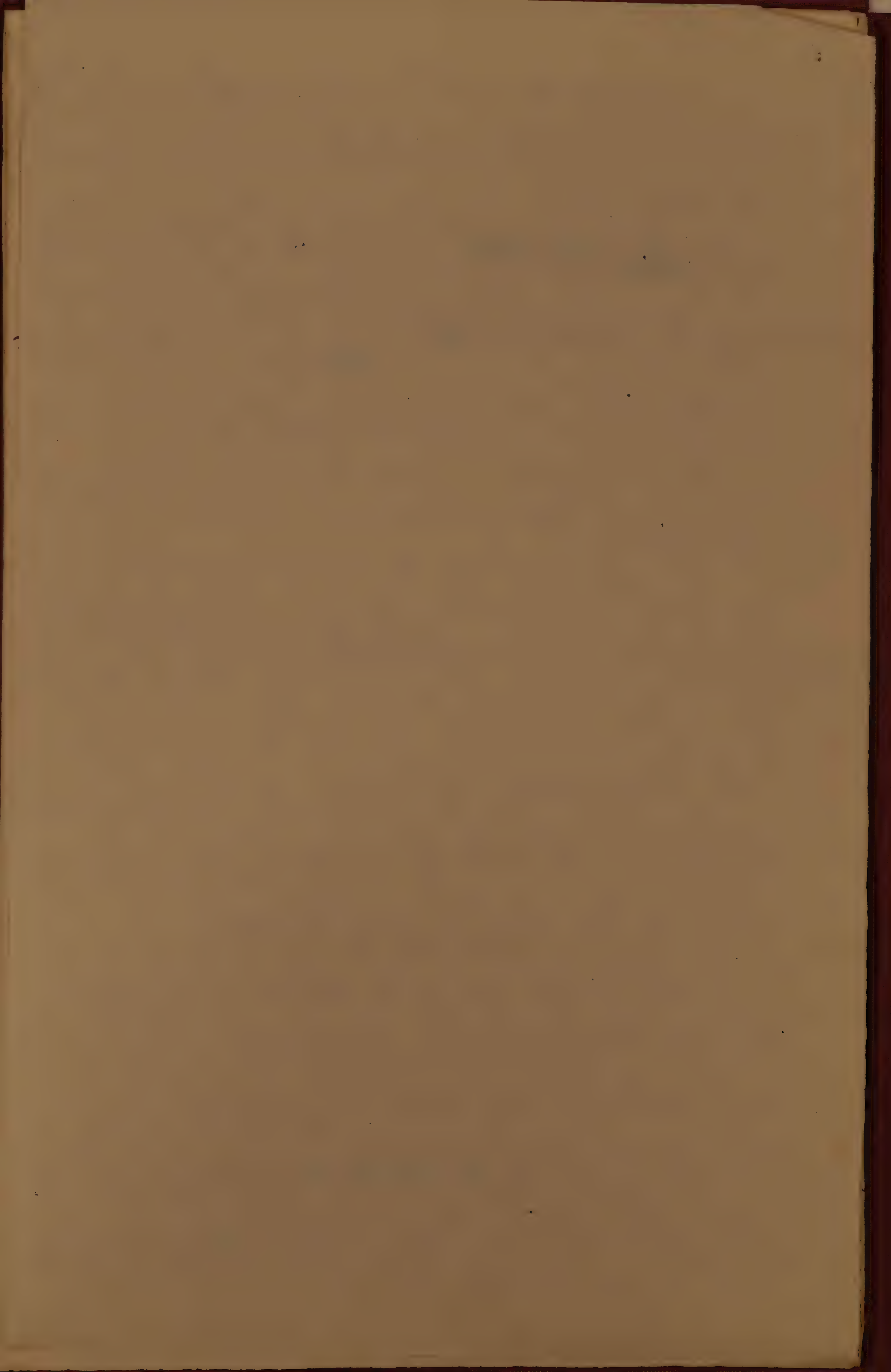
It is interesting to read in "Jaunts & Jollities" that ^{time it was written} ~~at the time~~ "jumping" is Leicestershire for 'Leaping' - 'Leaping' provincial for 'jumping'". ~~It may often be found~~

that words & expressions which have become what Surtees calls "provincial", in England, survive in Ireland among the country people.

"Can he jump?" asks an English buyer. "Is it lep? Higher leppin' is no use!" replies the seller.

The student of Manners & Customs in the Early Victorian Age, who has braced himself to labour through ~~the~~ the ^{merely} social pages of "Handley Cross", "Ask Mamma", "Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour" &c &c, will find himself wondering if, at that time, all men were pretentious, tippling, & cowardly, all women spiteful, vulgar, & affected. Surtees reserves a special brand of what may be described as the facetiousness of the servants' hall when he writes of those whom he calls "the Fair".

"Amelia was not going to give Emily a chance; for having dressed with all the expedition compatible with an attractive toilet - a lavender-~~coloured~~ colour-~~ed~~ satin with broad black lace flounces & some heavy jewellery on her well-turned arms, she came sidling in, so gently as almost to catch Emily in the act of playing the agreeable. Turning the sidle into a stately sail, with a haughty sort of sneer & toss of the head to her sister, as much as to say 'what are you doing to my man?' - a sneer that



suddenly changed to a sweet smile as her eye encountered Sponge's - she just motioned him to a sofa, & commenced a sotto voce conversation in the engaged couple style ".] There are another pair of sisters, who, having been reprimanded by "Mamma", are "so put about that they could hardly compose themselves at the piano," while ~~and~~ the voice of the third sister, Miss Harriet, in her satisfaction at their discomforture, "soars so exultingly as she accompanied herself upon her harp". And when Mrs Tightlace's large miniature brooch becomes loose, Mrs Yammerton "essayed to fasten it, which afforded her an opportunity of bursting into transports of delight at its beauty" - (it contains "a wonderful likeness of Mr T.") - "though in reality she was looking at Mrs Tightlace's berthe, to see if whether it was machinery lace, or real".

On the whole "The Gentlemen" - (a comprehensive little that is singularly inappropriate, since none such occur in any of these volumes) - come off very little better than "the Fair". Putting Mr Jorrocks aside, the hunting men, with few exceptions, are "reeling swagging bucks", or "a sad debauched-looking set, with pallid cheeks, trembling hands, & sunken eyes." Their names, as in "The Pilgrim's Progress", are of the nature of labels. "Mr Fleecall, the solicitor", Captain's Seedy buck & Cutitfat, the hangers-on of Sir Harry Scattercash. Madame Banboxery, the Milliner, & "the beautiful & tolerably virtuous Miss Glitters, ~~of the Astley's Royal Amphitheatre~~" There are good hunts in "Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour", told with the spirit & knowledge that is

the secret of Surtees' popularity, but it is the exception, in all these descriptions of various hunts, to find riders who go straight, huntservants who are not cowardly when sober, incompetent when drunk. ~~Lord~~ Mr Sponge, Lord Scamperdale, & Jack Spraggon, have succeeded in preserving their nerve in spite of all-night potations, but Sponge, when he rides in "The Aristocratic Steeplechase", has, characteristically, made a pact with a swindling livery-stable keeper to lose the race, & proposes ~~that~~ (as an Irish jockey confided to a friend) to win "only if the reins break"; ~~and~~ poor old Jack Spraggon, "spurring & flogging, grinning, squinting, & foaming at the mouth", tries to force a beaten horse over a five-foot wall, & is "rolled up like a ball of worsted", while ^{the feelings of} his friend & patron, Lord Scamperdale, ~~uttering~~ "choke his utterance" as he "recollects how easily Jack was satisfied; how he could dine off tripe & cowheel, & never grumbled at being put on a bad horse".

"But when a lord is in distress, consolation is never long in coming", says Surtees, smoothly & ^{spitefully} Mr Jawleyford brings the bereaved nobleman to Jawleyford Court, & there he remained sufficiently long for Mrs Jawleyford to persuade him that he would be far better married, & that either of her amiable daughters would make him an excellent wife". Naturally there is bitter competition between the sisters, but "though for a long time victory was doubtful, a slight touch of rouge that Amelia thought would clinch the matter, decided his Lordship against her".

Many pages in all the books are devoted to the costumes of the various characters,

& the descriptions are careful to give every detail. "Mr Sponge made himself an uncommon swell - He put on a desperately stiff starch, secured in front with a large gold fox-head pin with carbuncle eyes; a fine, fancy-fronted shirt, with a slight tendency to pink, adorned with mosaic-gold-tethered studs of sparkling diamonds (or French paste, as the case might be) a white waist coat with fancy buttons; a blue coat with bright-plain ones, & a velvet collar, black tights, with broad black-&-white Cranbourne-alley-looking stockings (socks, rather) & patent leather pumps with gilt-buckles - Sponge was proud of his leg." (It is impossible not to regret that dinner parties are no longer brightened by dandies ~~off~~ such as Mr Sponge) The costumes of the Fair are described with almost equal minuteness.

"Mr Barnington's dress, of the richest & palest pink satin, was girdled with a diamond stomacher, & a lengthening train swept majestically along the floor. Across her beautifully moulded neck & shoulders, in graceful folds, "was thrown a white Cachmere (sic) shawl, & her ungloved arm exhibited a profusion of massive jewellery!" "But what a note of admiration our Billy is! How gloriously he is attired. His naturally curling hair, how gracefully it flows; his elliptic collar, how faultlessly it stands; his cravat, how correct; his shirt, how wonderfully fine, & oh! how happy he must be with such splendid sparkling diamond studs - such beautiful amethyst buttons at his wrists - & such a love of a chain disporting itself over his richly-embroidered blood-stone-but-toned vest".

were Mr Swtrees alive ^{one} day & cannot but think the Sporting & the Fashion

journals would compete for the services
of his pen, so skilled in detail, so luscious in style!
~~When~~ In conclusion, it ~~cannot~~ ^{may be} asked
why has no Hunt-Bell Committee dedicated
a Fancy Dress Dance to Surtees, & Command-
ed their guests to select their costumes from
his books, following carefully the directions
so lavishly provided? Leech's drawings
would ably supplement the instructions
of the text. ~~But again we ask~~

But can any hunting country
produce a gentleman endowed by Providence
with the requisite outline for impersonating
Mr John Jorrocks, M.F.H.?

(N.B. It is desired that this article is signed,
the following is suggested)

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W.E.J.

Dear Mr. E. E. Folger
I have just received
your letter of the 14th
and am glad to hear
that you are well.
I am also well and
hope this finds you
the same.

